

STRAIGHT SCOOP ABOUT RESTRICTED OFFICER STRENGTH

By Division of Public Affairs

HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS, Washington, D.C. (Aug 28) -- Results of the month-long Restricted Officer Program (ROP) review, carried out earlier this year, are already being felt in the Marine Corps warrant officer community. Simultaneously, there is some confusion as word about the review's findings and recommended courses of action filter out to the operating forces.

"One recent news report created the impression that the number of new warrant officers who will attend next year's Warrant Officer Basic Course grew by 25 percent," said Maj. John Nettles, Manpower Plans and Policy Branch, Headquarters Marine Corps. "That is not the case, although next year's projected class of 255 new warrant officers will be the largest since 1989."

According to Nettles, changes underway in the warrant officer ranks result from a combination of factors -- adjusted grade shaping, retirements, several new MOSs, and billet reductions mandated by the Quadrennial Defense Review, Force Structure Review Group, and the Base Realignment and Closure program."

There are currently 48 warrant officer and 18 limited duty officer MOSs in the Marine Corps.

The warrant officer community has been undergoing a series of minor adjustments since the 1993 Restricted Officer Program Study. That was followed by a Corps-wide warrant officer conference at Camp Lejeune in 1996 and this spring's ROP review at Headquarters Marine Corps. The main purpose of the review was to account for billet requirements and ensure a continuous promotion flow for warrant officers.

"The commandant approved a grade shaping policy in June 1996 designed to provide a continuous promotion flow to CWO5 (CWO5 - 5%, CWO4 - 15%, CWO3 - 30%, CWO2/WO - 50%), explained Nettles. "There is a perception that the resulting allocations remained constant. But the number of CWO5s are not based on Marine Corps requirements, per se. Rather, authorizations are derived from our grade shaping policy, which is based on law. Since warrant officer structure changed, the allocations of warrant officers in the various MOSs needed to be adjusted."

Since the initial grade shaping policy was approved in 1996, structure has

decreased in 45 MOSs that existed at that time. Yet, the overall requirement for warrant officers increased when three new MOSs were created.

One of the key factors in updating the grade shaping policy is the law that prohibits more than 5 percent of the active duty warrant officer population -- in any of the services -- being appointed to the grade of CWO5. To ensure that ceiling is not exceeded, the Marine Corps is planning to promote CWO5s each year on Feb. 1. That is when the number of warrant officers on active duty is at its peak, because that is the date new warrant officers are appointed each year.

Nettles explained that promotion and accession plans strive to keep the warrant officer community at 100 percent of its authorized structure, which is projected to be 1,970. That means the Corps is authorized to have 99 Marines in the grade of CWO5.

Also driving the number of new promotions for next year is a retirement projection of 12 CWO5s before next February. With 95 CWO5s currently on deck, 16 promotions to that grade are authorized on Feb. 1.

When the latest ROP review was carried out, 250 projected vacancies were identified to occur during fiscal year 1999. Projections called for the Enlisted to Warrant Officer Board to select 247 candidates, the Marine Gunners Board to select four, and the Marine Corps Recruiting Command to select four.

"The number of selections are based on the Corps' needs and its authorized warrant officer structure," Nettles reemphasized. "Driven by the combination of factors discussed earlier, next year's class size is larger than in recent years, but there was not a sudden, significant increase in authorized billets. The class is just where the most immediate, visible effects are being seen as we carry out the recommendations of the ROP review.

"Understanding how the restricted officer program works is critical," said Nettles. "That's why I will accompany the monitors from MMOA on their 'road show' this fall, which will take us to all bases and stations. I will be providing a detailed brief, to include policies and laws that drive the restricted officer program."

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